



For Immediate Release
Wednesday, May 25, 2005

News Release

Risk of West Nile Virus Up for This Holiday Weekend

A UDOH Survey Shows that Many Utahns Wore DEET in 2004 - It's Time to Wear it in 2005!

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Utahns will be heading outdoors in large numbers for the Memorial Day weekend, and the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) is urging them to Fight the Bite! As Utahns spend more time outdoors the risk of getting mosquito bites increases, therefore increasing the risk of West Nile virus (WNV) infection.

According to mosquito abatement officials, with the latest increase in temperature and snow melt, more possible mosquito habitats are being created statewide. Nuisance and day-time biting mosquitoes are not the primary transmitter of West Nile virus but the increase of these may signify increased numbers of the mosquitoes that transmit WNV later.

Utah is now in its third year of WNV detection and UDOH research shows that many Utahns heard the message last year about wearing DEET-based mosquito repellent. “Eight months have passed since Utahns had to protect themselves during outdoor activity and it’s time to remind them of the risk,” says Dr. Robert Rolfs, State Epidemiologist, UDOH.

Each year the UDOH uses the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) telephone survey to monitor various trends including those surrounding West Nile virus prevention. In 2004, 65 percent of Utahns interviewed reported having used mosquito repellents with DEET but only eight percent reported using it always when outdoors from dusk through dawn. Respondents also reported that 23 percent used protective clothing and six percent reported having removed standing water from around their home.

These data show that many Utahns are not fully protecting themselves. To continue to educate Utahns, the UDOH and partner agencies will conduct activities including the Fight the Bite! media campaign, retailer promotions for purchase of DEET products, billboards, posters, fliers, presentations and news updates throughout 2005.

- MORE -

Page 2 of 2 - Risk of West Nile Virus Up for This Holiday Weekend

WNV surveillance in Utah is underway and will continue throughout the summer and fall. So far in 2005, no WNV activity or human cases have been detected in Utah. However, non-human WNV activity has been detected in seven states, including California and Utah's neighboring state, Arizona.

For more information, call your local health department or the UDOH's Health Resource Line at 1-888-222-2542. For up-to-date information on the spread of WNV in Utah, please visit: www.health.utah.gov/wnv.

Editor's Note: Additional information is provided in the attached prevention Fight the Bite! fact sheet and the 2004 Season Recap. Throughout the WNV season, the UDOH webpage will be updated each Wednesday with available detection information.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.